

critical digest

Vol. III No. 20

January 15, 1951

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Four Twelves Are 48-48th Street Theatre, 1/17/51. Aldrich and Myers production of Joseph Kesselring's new comedy with Anne Revere, Ernest Truex and Hiram Sherman. Directed by Otto Preminger...Angel in the Pawnshop-Booth, 1/8/51. Eddie Dowling and Joan McCracken in comedy by A.B. Shiffrin that was tried out in summer theatres. Produced by Dowling and Anthony B. Farrell, staged by John Larson.

Digests of Current Reviews - more on back page

The Royal Family-City Center, 1/10/51. First performance of revival of Ferber-Kaufman play drew seven "pro" votes from the daily critics. In spite of first act accident to John Emery's leg, the show went on. Ethel Griffies filled in with anecdotes while the doctors bandaged the actor. Though most critics thought 23 year old comedy of theatrical life held up well, they did spy several creaky spots. Many gave the cast, headed by Griffies, Emery, Ruth Hussey and Peggy Ann Garner the benefit of the doubt in regard to muffed lines. They didn't think Director Richard Whorf had enough time to rehearse. Dissenters included critics of Post, Newark News and Women's Wear. All felt play deserved much better treatment. Hawkins, WT&S, spotlighted Peggy Ann Garner for the best performance of her career. Most were convinced play would pick up pace during remainder of limited run.

The House of Bernarda Alba-ANTA Playhouse, 1/7/51. Split decision from newspaper reviewers greeted ANTA'S fourth production. Mild "pro" reviews were recorded by critics of Herald Tribune, Compass, WT&S, Newark News and Women's Wear. They considered this the best and easiest to understand of the Lorca plays. Katina Paxinou's performance was deemed perfect by admirers. Supporting players Ruth Saville, Kim Stanley, Helen Craig and Ruth Ford were praised in all female cast. Director Boris Tamarin took most of the blame from those who didn't enjoy the production. Atkinson, Times, didn't believe the direction was lyric enough for such an uneventful script. Translators Lujan and O'Connell were at fault, in the opinion of Sheaffer, Eagle, for providing prosaic script. McClain, Journal American, panned it for being highly confusing, and improbable. Chapman, News, just found it too repetitive.

Second Threshold-Morosco, 1/2/51. Alfred de Liagre's production of Philip Barry's last play, as revised by Robert Sherwood, won favor of two weekly appraisers. Gibbs, New Yorker, considered it a typical Barry script complete in its inability to state exact purpose of work. He enjoyed it, but believed that only Clive Brook and Betsy von Furstenburg were acting. The rest merely recited lines. Newsweek critic thought script had ring of the true Barry. Five weekly critics panned show. Main reason was that script just skimmed surface of its subject. Time critic thought Margaret Phillips miscast. Marshall, Nation, considered the script tasteless and trying.

Editorial Pros and Cons

Current practice of sending reviewers free copies of verse dramas before the opening is not playing fair with playgoer. If the producer spends thousands of dollars of the angels' money on a play, he should let it explain itself. Either that, or he should supply free copies of the script to every ticket buyer.

News & Notes

Shows that closed include The Cocktail Party and Black Chiffon...Hobe Morrison, Variety, will soon be a father, anticipates Winchell...Ann Holmes, Houston Chronicle, and Samuel Wilson, Columbus Dispatch, viewing plays in NYC...Gertrude Lawrence stars on CBS-TV Jan. 16 in Biography...Helen Hayes plays Mary of Scotland on ABC-TV Feb. 16 Davenport Free Theatre on East 27th Street celebrates 30th anniversary of repertoire.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '
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Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the shows for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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| 1. NY Times | 11. Women's Wear Daily | 21. Freeman |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonwealth |
| 3. NY News | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. George Jean Nathan | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass | 15. Ward Morehouse | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. Morning Telegraph | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Journal American | 17. Variety | 27. Time |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard | 28. Nation |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 19. Theatre Arts | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Newark News | 20. New Leader | 30. New Yorker |

AFFAIRS OF STATE-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-7-8-13-17-18-27-30.

Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.

ARMS AND THE MAN-Arena, 10/26/50. Pro: 4-9-10-11-17-18-21-23-29.

Con: 1-2-3-5-6-7-8-12-13-14-15-20-26.

BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-6-15-17-19-20-21-22.

BLESS YOU ALL-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Pro: 13 votes. Con: 1-5-10-11-14-15-17-18-22-24-27-29. None: 12-13-16-19-21-25.

CALL ME MADAM-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 1-8-12-20-22-25-29. So-So: 14.

THE COUNTRY GIRL-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 4-8-14-27-28-30.

GENTLEMAN PREFER BLONDES-Ziegfeld, 12/8/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22.

GUYS AND DOLLS-46th St. Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 28. None: 16-19-21.

THE HAPPY TIME-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30.

KING LEAR-National, 12/25/50. Pro: 1-3-5-6-7-9-10-11-17-18-23-26-28-30. Con: 2-4-8-27.

KISS ME KATE-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 29. None: 21-28.

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING-Royale, 12/8/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 3-11-29. So-So: 17-30.

THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 14. So-So: 2-27-30.

OUT OF THIS WORLD-Century, 12/21/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-10-11-23. Con: 1-3-9-17-18-20-26-27. So-So: 2.

PEEP SHOW-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-9-10-13-15-16-18-23. Con: 1-2-11-14-19-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-12-17.

PETER PAN-St. James, 4/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 7-14-30. So-So: 12-15-18.

RING ROUND THE MOON-Martin Beck, 11/23/50. Pro: 4-5-6-9-14-15-17-18-20-24-26-28-30. Con: 3-7-8-13-22-23-27. So-So: 1-2.

SEASON IN THE SUN-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10.

SOUTH PACIFIC-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-11-13-15-16-17-18-19-24-25-26-30. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-Fulton, 12/24/50. Pro: 1-2-3-6-7-8-9-10-11-17-18-23-27-29-30. Con: 5-28.

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' Green Room Department '
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HAPPY BIRTHDAY... 200th anniversary of New York's first play greeted by editorials in Herald Tribune and Times. Former urged Council of Living Theatre to include stage plays in their overall plans of celebration, while Times highlighted the nationwide essay contest for high school students...CBS Public Service programs were devoted to "You and the Living Theatre", which featured interviews with Arthur Schwartz, John van Druten, Agnes De Mille, Ralph Alswang and Melvyn Douglas...NBC broadcast scenes from recent hits with Helen Hayes, Alfred Lunt and Katherine Cornell.

TEN WORST... Annual of "Ten Bests" are silly, comments Sobol, Journal American. Though he has been a zealous enthusiast of "Burns Mantle's Ten Best Plays", he always disagrees with the choices. Some day he is going to pick the "Ten Worst of the Ten Best List".

WHY CRITICS MARRY... Occupational hazards of the bachelor critic were revealed by McClain, Journal American. The question is simply what do you do with the lady while you write your review. You can have one or two drinks after the play and then rush to make your deadline. Or you can have her read a book while you try to type. The critic discovered the hard way that it doesn't always work to send her to a party before hand.

STUDENT TICKETS... Cut rate tickets for students suggested by Irene Mayer Selznick, producer of Bell, Book and Candle won support of Coleman, Mirror, who remembers as an undergrad how hard it was to raise bucks for tickets. But in his day Uncle Joe LeBlanc's Cut-Rate Ticket Office was in operation.

BROADWAY PEDDLERS... Theatregoers were urged by Burr, Playbill, to follow advice of Broadway Association and ignore the urgings of the high pressure commission canvassers posing as collectors for charity drives. The people rattling the tin boxes get from 40 per cent to 50 per cent of the funds collected, the charity whose name they use often get nothing.

JUDGING RECORDS... Split decisions on two record albums of hits filed by Taubman, Times, and Hammond, Compass. Times music editor couldn't find much enjoyment in Decca's Guys and Dolls with the original cast, while Compass music critic thought it was perfect. The opinions were just reversed in considering Decca's Call Me Madam.

ACTORS HONOR ROLL... Ward Morehouse's semi-annual honor roll in WT&S included -- George Relph, Paul Kelley, Mildred Dunnock, Barbara Bel Geddes, Charlotte Greenwood, Clive Brook, Ethel Merman, Frederic March, Edna Best, Rex Harrison, Isabel Bigley, Flora Robson, John Gielgud, Celeste Holm, Louis Calhern, Lillian Gish and the supporting casts of the plays they appeared in.

THEATRE PEEVES... Nobody asked Jimmy Cannon, Post, but: He thinks the most neglected performance of year is Martin Gabel in King Lear, Boris Karloff is a comedian when he plays a horror role and that no restaurant matches Lindy's cheese blintzes.

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' Theatre News Round Up '
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William McDermott, Cleveland Plain Dealer, back to post after being ill...ANTA Fund Campaign has raised \$211,000...Capitol Records may sign Jose Ferrer for 14 albums...British censor cut scene in Shaw's Far-Fetched Fables...Samuel French and Baker's Plays may merge...Intercollegiate Musical Comedy Association formed by Octagon Club of Cornell...King Lear leads lectured on Shakespeare at Conn. colleges...All columns report Russell Nye, Call Me Madam, has become close friend of Windsors...Co-producer Derrick Lynn Thomas took over leading role in Arena Theatre's Arms and the Man...Limit of 48 house seats for musicals and 24 for plays set by League of N.Y. Theatres...Peter Pan opens in Boston Feb. 5, The Consul opens in London Feb. 6...President Truman attended Apple of His Eye in Washington.

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' Interview Hi-Lights '

BRANDON de WILDE...The Member of the Wedding youngster isn't becoming a spoiled brat, Rice, Post, discovered. A year after the hit play opened he found the boy's parents giving up their own careers as actors to see that the child actor doesn't behave like one. And he still hasn't read the notices and interviews. The de Wildes agree there will be no more acting for their son after he is 12 until he finishes high school and maybe college.

ABE BURROWS...Guys and Dolls writer, who plays a large part in current TV, is worried about the new medium, he explained to Torre, WT&S. People just aren't reading now that they own TV sets. He wonders where we will get new ideas for TV if we don't read, much less new ideas for other projects.

GLORIA SWANSON...Twentieth Century co-star leads a hectic life for a grandmother aged 51, Fields, Mirror, surmised. During a noon interview at her house, the rooms were filled with groups of people waiting for attention. Managers and secretaries, fitters with new dresses, people to be interviewed for her ad lib radio show, and a group waiting for an endorsement for a hand lotion.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '

An Enemy of the People-Broadhurst, 12/28/50. Four more favorable reviews added to file of Arthur Miller's modern adaptation of the Ibsen classic. Critics of Newsweek, Cue, Variety and Christian Science Monitor found the Miller script, produced by Lars Nerdenson and staged by Robert Lewis, lively and up to date. Acting by Frederic March, Florence Eldridge, Morris Carnovsky and the supporting cast was roundly applauded. Critics of Time and Billboard felt Miller switched play into a contrived, topical melodrama. Marshall, Nation, believes the present version plays up the weaknesses of the script. Gibbs, New Yorker, panned script as being outdated.

Twentieth Century-Fulton, 12/24/50. Sheaffer, Eagle, who missed Hecht-MacArthur revival's opening on Christmas Eve, caught up with it at its new home. He enjoyed the entire production. Biggest surprise of the evening was fine performance of Gloria Swanson. Acting and direction by Jose Ferrer was not such a surprise. Shipley, New Leader, joined the critical bandwagon. He found no signs of wear in the script. But Crisler, Christian Science Monitor, thought script proved it was merely a period piece.

King Lear-National, 12/25/50. Shakespeare's tragedy can be acted, argues George Jean Nathan. Theatrical history shows the critics devoted praise to 12 actors in the leading part. But Nathan doesn't think much of the present Joseph and Cohen revival starring Louis Calhern. The actor simply is not up to the role, comments Nathan. The cast ranges from satisfactory to poor, and director John Houseman speeded up the script too much. Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, took just the opposite view. Calhern's performance is illuminating and Houseman's staging filled with the humanity of the drama. The large supporting cast acted intelligently and intelligibly.

Out of This World-Century, 12/21/50. Diverse opinions expressed by Clurman, New Republic, and Crisler, Christian Science Monitor, on Cole Porter's new musical. Former found score weak, but thought sets and costumes by Lemuel Ayers plus Porter's fizzing lyrics, plus the general pleasantness of the cast saved it. Latter discovered it was compounded of equal proportions of gutter and glitter, filled with double entendres on all sides. He doubts if even the Greeks had a word for it. Charlotte Greenwood was welcomed by both.

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' Legit Stuff '

St. Paul, Minn. City Council warned public via newspapers and radio that unless it responds better the town will be wiped off the theatrical map...National Collegiate Players awarded first annual citation to Frederic March.

